

SRI LANKAN TOURISM SECTOR EXPECTS 2.3 MILLION ARRIVALS



The tourism sector in Sri Lanka has achieved a remarkable feat, welcoming over 800,000 tourists. This success story has ignited a sense of optimism, hinting at the possibility of surpassing the year-end targets.

The achievement is particularly significant as it was previously attained only once, in August of the previous year. It underscores the substantial strides made in the tourism sector and mirrors the profound interest and engagement with Sri Lanka as a favored destination for travelers.

During the first week of May, Sri Lanka welcomed 28,525 tourists alone, which pushed the total number of visitors to 813,176.

Sri Lanka Tourism is steadfast in its commitment to achieve 2.3 million tourist arrivals and generate a revenue of \$4 billion in 2024. In May, India was the top market, contributing 5,600 tourists, followed by the Maldives with 3,170 visitors and the UK with 1,888 tourists. Despite a seasonal trend of low arrivals in May, Sri Lankan tourism remains optimistic.

It is launching a new global PR and digital campaign in 15 source markets to attract more visitors. The year-to-date data highlights India's dominance in the market, with 129,183 tourists making up 16% of total arrivals. Russia follows closely with 108,140 tourists (13%), trailed by the UK at 9% (73,880), Germany at 7% (59,508), and China at 5% (49,432). This commitment to diversify the tourist market instills confidence and security in the future of Sri Lanka's tourism sector.

Travelers and tourism industry professionals have complained about the launch of the new e-Visa system in Sri Lanka. The country's ports of entry, particularly Bandaranaike International Airport, have also experienced some issues. As a result, the Sri Lankan authorities have decided to introduce a new 30-day single-entry tourist visa starting on May 7, 2024. This decision was made to ease the tension caused by the new entry requirements.

On April 17, Sri Lanka replaced its Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) system, which was introduced in 2012, with a more secure electronic visa (e-Visa) system. Unlike the ETA system, which only required visitors to provide textual data, the new e-Visa system now requires visitors to submit a copy of their passport and passport photo, enhancing the security of the process. This change is designed to make the visa application process more streamlined and user-friendly, providing potential tourists with a sense of relief and reassurance.

Sri Lankan Tourism Minister Harin Fernando announced on X (formerly Twitter) that from May 7, **a 30-day single-entry visa would be issued at \$50 until the government's proposal for free visas to more than 50 countries is finalized.**

Although the Cabinet has yet to consider the recent proposal for an e-visa fee waiver for more than 50 countries, most travelers will still require an e-visa to travel to Sri Lanka.

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